

DEFINING AND REDEFINING IDENTITY

Walk up to an individual and ask him what his identity is. It all depends on the setting he is in how this question is answered. Sitting in a classroom the person will give his first and last name. By stating his last name he lets the world know he belongs to a certain family or clan. Gathered at an international conference the individual will state his name and the country he represents. If this is an international interdenominational conference, people will be inclined to reveal name, country and religious affiliation. The act of identification not only takes place at the individual level but also takes place on the national level. Nations tend to describe themselves in terms as 'peace-loving', 'democratic' or 'pious'. How does Aruba define itself at present? How did Aruba define itself in the past?

During the past decades the Aruban community defined itself in various terms. Around 1930 the political struggle for the Status Aparte began. Aruba wanted to secede from the Netherlands Antilles and become an autonomous part within the kingdom of the Netherlands. The Aruban people felt that financially they were contributing as much as Curacao to the state coffers yet, in return, receiving little. In this struggle Aruba defined itself as a nation of mixed Indian - European stock. The enemy, Curacao, had African ancestral ties. During the whole battle this difference was used as political rhetoric. Needless to say that at times certain remarks were of a very racist nature. In order to distinguish herself from Curacao, Aruba chose a different form of Papiamentu. This form had to reflect the mixed Indian/European origin of the language. The very thought that Papiamentu may

have African roots was brushed aside. Defining herself in relation to Curacao ceased when Aruba welcomed the Status Aparte in January 1986.

The defining process moved to another stage. The economic situation of the island was devastating back in 1986. The Lago refinery had stopped operations after six decades. The government of the day took steps to jumpstart the economy by investing in the tourist industry. Because the local market could not provide sufficient workers, thousands of migrants were flown in. Most of these migrants came from Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. They brought their food, music, way of life and value system with them. The Aruban community was asked once more to define itself. Since the nineties of the past century we have seen the revival of old traditions. A festival as Dera Gai is now celebrated with

